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Editorial

Brian Charlesworth

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Biology Letters has continued to flourish since my previous editorial three years ago in the inaugural issue, with continued growth in submissions and acceptances. We are still highly selective, with a sizeable fraction of submissions rejected by members of the Editorial Board without external review, and an overall acceptance rate of 31%. Under the guidance of the former Publishing Editor, Christina Walker, we moved to a bimonthly publishing schedule in 2007. This has increased the need for vigilance in making sure that all stages of the publication process move smoothly. Christina and her successor, Fiona Pring, have coped magnificently with this, and we are processing papers faster than ever (an average receipt to first decision time under five weeks and a receipt to online publication mean of just nine weeks, a decrease of 15% since last year). This is, I believe, an important attraction for potential authors, and we will continue to work hard to maintain our record of rapid publication and rigorous reviewing.

Last year, we received our first impact factor from ISI, a creditable 2.0 for a newly established journal (we have only been a stand-alone journal since 2005). While our coverage is very broad, the majority of our papers are whole organism and evolutionary biology; our impact factor compares well with those of many of the well-established journals in these fields. We are confident that this will increase as the journal matures.

Another important index of our success is the extensive coverage of *Biology Letters* papers in the short report sections of leading journals such as *Nature*, and in the media in both the UK and abroad. Our short paper format is clearly attractive to reporters and the Royal Society's press office does an excellent job of alerting the media to papers of potential interest. Many of the topics that we cover are very appealing to the general public, who are at least as interested in the antics of animals, and the threat to wildlife from human activities, as they are in the latest advances in medicine and molecular biology. I was especially pleased to see the wide media coverage of the paper by Turvey *et al.* (2007) on the apparent extinction of the Yangtze river dolphin, a tragedy that is all too likely to be repeated in coming years unless governments and businesses come to their senses. We hope to increase our coverage of biological aspects of global change and are planning a special issue focusing on this topic in 2008.

One of the rewards of editing *Biology Letters* is my exposure to a range of biological subjects that is far outside my own area of expertise. I have not got space to mention all the papers from last year's volume that I found especially enjoyable, but here are a few examples. Anthes & Michiels (2007) showed that hermaphrodite sea slugs acting as males repeatedly stab their partners with their bipartite penis, ensuring that the partner who stabs more rapidly is the one who transfers his sperm. Hoso *et al.* (2007) showed that a group of southeast Asian snakes that specialize in eating snails have more teeth on the right than on the left of their mandibles, which allows them to extract right-handed coiled snails from their shells more efficiently. These, regrettably somewhat violent, examples show the unexpected ways in which natural selection can affect behaviour and anatomy. On a more peaceful note, Kishida *et al.* (2007) showed that fully marine mammals (cetaceans) have secondarily lost many of their functional olfactory receptor genes compared with their terrestrial relatives, whereas the partly marine sea turtles and sea lions retain them. Use it or lose it!

Finally, I would like to thank all members of the Editorial Board and the Royal Society's publishing team who are involved with *Biology Letters* for their hard work and efficiency.

Brian Charlesworth
(*Editor-in-Chief*)

Anthes, N. & Michiels, N. K. 2007 Precopulatory stabbing, hypodermic injections and unilateral copulations in a hermaphroditic sea slug. *Biol. Lett.* **3**, 121–124. (doi:10.1098/rsbl.2006.0596)

Hoso, M., Asami, T. & Hori, M. 2007 Right-handed snakes: convergent evolution of asymmetry for functional specialization. *Biol. Lett.* **3**, 169–172. (doi:10.1098/rsbl.2006.0600)

Kishida, T., Kubota, S., Shirayama, Y. & Fukami, H. 2007 The olfactory receptor gene repertoires in secondary-adapted marine vertebrates: evidence for reduction of the functional proportions in cetaceans. *Biol. Lett.* **3**, 428–430. (doi:10.1098/rsbl.2007.0191)

Turvey, S. T. *et al.* 2007 First human-caused extinction of a cetacean species? *Biol. Lett.* **3**, 537–540. (doi:10.1098/rsbl.2007.0292)